No. 15

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

John Procter had more than a mere suspicion that his daughter was running after Phil Gordon. When she returned as Gordon's second wife, he was deeply shocked.
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JOHN PROCTER was looking sharply at the girl as she paused abruptly. It was very evident that it cost her a terrible effort to continue what was to be a confession. For a moment he considered an idea of making her stop. For nothing she might say, even though it was in condemnation of herself, could change his feelings toward her.

"I am not in the habit of accepting confidences from young girls," he said. "You won't have to tell me anything further unless——"

"But I must," she broke in eagerly. "Indeed, I must. And please do not interrupt me. Now, in the first place, my name is not Rosalyn Winters, though, I much prefer to be called 'dear' by you.

"Even Rosalyn isn't my real name because I was adopted by Mrs. Winters out of a fondlings' home seventeen years ago when I was only six months old. I have never felt toward her as one should toward a mother.

"But she has been very kind to me in her way. I have had a good education and a good many nice things all at her expense. This spring she told me why.

"Everything she has done for me was so that I should be able to take care of her when she grows old. It was because I promised to be good-looking that she chose me from the other foundling babies. She has done everything in her power to make me more attractive. She thinks she has succeeded."

Young John Procter pressed her close and kissed her.

"Thanks for seeming to agree with me," the girl went on. "The way I am to repay Mrs. Winters is by marrying a rich man who can take care of us both. She finally picked on young Mr. John Procter as the victim and brought me here. Mrs. Winters even figured out the scheme by which I was to pretend to drown in the

lake of the Procter estate.

"She had heard that young John usually took a plunge in this lake in the morning. But things did not plan out her way. Instead of being rescued by young Procter, you appeared upon the scene. And now I have fallen in love with you, the stable boy."

She ended with a heart-breaking sob only to look up and find the young man laughing softly to himself.

"What—what is the matter?" she cried.

"So you fell in love with the stable boy when you had been told to lay for John Procter," he replied, still laughing.

"Yes, and I am not sorry, dear," the girl pleaded as she nestled closer to his bosom. "And since this is to be our last night together, I will be yours entirely. To-night is ours, but to-morrow——"

She gave a little shiver and her eyes closed.

"Alright, this night is ours," the young man exclaimed in a tone of recklessness. "And I'll make it so that nothing in the world can ever part us."

When later he took her to the bathhouse and helped her dress, her cheeks were flushed as they had never been flushed before. Occasionally a little sob shook her slender frame.

Outside they met a dark, shadowy figure.

"Your father is waiting to see you in the library," Captain Malcolm's said.

"I am coming," young John Procter replied with determination.

The girl's eyes widened. She clutched her companion by the arm.

"You—you are——?"

"Yes," he finished the sentence for her, "I am John Procter, and not the stable boy as you always thought I was."

"Oh!" She uttered the syllable more with awe than surprise. "And your father has sent for you. What will he say? I—I hope he hasn't found out that you have been meeting me down here."

The young man laughed.

"Well, if he hasn't, he will know all about it in a few minutes." He put an arm around her waist and drew her forward. "You are coming with me, dear. We will never be parted again."

They walked up to the house in silence. The girl clung to her lover like a drowning man would to a floating raft. From time to time she glanced at him shyly, almost reverently.

On the veranda they met old Jonathan Procter with an ominous frown on his face.

"You will come into the library at once," the master of the house ordered, pointing a finger at his son. "And bring that young woman with you."

"Yes, sir," the boy replied. He kept his arm around the girl reassuringly until they were inside.

Jonathan Procter's glowing eyes were mercilessly analyzing the character of the girl's face.

Her dress was rumpled a little. She was fresh and dainty and an apparition of young feminine loveliness. The old man aroused himself from the study of her features with a sigh.

"John," he said to his son, "you will go to your room at once. And you," he addressed Captain Malcolm who stood respectfully at the door, "will wait outside until I finish talking with this young lady. When I am through with her, you may take her home."

The boy could not say why he obeyed. Perhaps it was force of habit which caused him to leave the room. Perhaps it was the fear of something he saw in his father's eyes.

Alone with the girl, Jonathan Procter turned to her abruptly.

"So you have been meeting my boy down at the lake," he began harshly. "That was wrong and the thing must end right now. I suppose he fell in love with you. I can't blame you. Nature has made you her victim. Your mouth is too apt for kisses. And I don't believe you could be true to any one man.

"But love affairs in which young women like you become involved in, are trifling in a way. They usually end quickly if no material benefit is in sight. As I said before, this thing must end."

He paused and eyed her shrewdly. "How much?" he asked finally.

"How much?" the girl repeated dully.

"Yes," Jonathan Procter reached for his check book. "What is the amount of the check I shall write to soothe your wounded feelings, to pay your traveling expenses to some distant spot where my son will never see you again?"

She began to cry softly.

"I—I couldn't give him up," she sobbed.

"But you must," the old man insisted.

"But I wouldn't trade him for money," she explained. "You see, he was not John Procter to me. I believed him to be a poor stable boy and the only reason I gave myself to him was because—because I had learned to love him with all my heart and soul."

She stood up with a suddenly assumed womanly dignity, her hand with a handkerchief in it placed over her mouth for a moment to stifle back the sobs.

"If — if you don't mind," she spoke again very softly, "I'll go. I don't think I can stand any more. You see," she finished with a childish quaver in her voice, "you have made your son such a nice boy."

"And you won't take a check?" the old man demanded.

"No—no!" She held up her hand with a sudden flash in her violet eyes. "I'll give him up if I must. But all the money could not buy him from me."

For a moment it seemed that Jonathan Procter was about to relent. Then he straightened himself up.

No, he must not weaken now. The boy was entirely too young to become seriously attached to a woman. For his own sake and his future the thing must be killed.

"Please let me go," whimpered the girl.

"Very well."

At the summons of an unheard buzzer, Captain Malcolm entered the library. Not a single word was said. At a motion from his master he took the girl gently by the arm and ler her away.

Young John Procter did not come downstairs again during the evening.

Experience had taught him that nothing could be gained by acting contrary to his father's will when the latter was wrought up. But he did not retire until Captain Malcolm returned and told him that he had taken the girl home.

The next morning John met his father in the library. The old man seemed quite elated.

"Well, my boy," he began, "I am going to send you to Europe for a year. Preparations are being made for the trip right now. Captain Malcolm will accompany you."

John had never questioned his father's wishes before. And he was not anxious to do so now.

But finally he asked: "Why, dad?"

"You know why, I believe," Jonathan Procter said evenly. "You must get away from that girl. The danger

is more serious than I expected. You happen to be the only one I care about on the face of the earth, and when your happiness is threatened, it makes my own unsafe."

After a lengthy pause he added, his voice cold:

"Last night I had intended to simply send the girl away. Now I see that it is not enough. I have no control over her actions, but you are a member of my family, my only boy, and not yet of age. You must realize that as such you are subject to my orders."

John looked his father squarely in the eye.

"Suppose I refuse to go?" he said. "I intend to marry her."

Jonathan Procter measured his son calculatingly. He sighed.

"Yes, I believe you would do it, my boy. However, I must remind you again that you are not of age yet, and won't be for another year. I am still legally the director of your actions. I shall not force my claim, but instead merely point out that the only way for you to continue to receive your allowance is for you to follow the plans I have outlined for you.

"Permit me to argue in conclusion that you have very little to lose in acceding to my wishes. If at the end of one year of absence you still wish to marry this young woman whom you have met so unconventionally, I will withdraw my opposition. That is fair enough, isn't it? All I ask is that you do not see her for one year."

Young John someway felt a chill at the ominousness of that phrase "for a year." It was absurd to think that he could ever forget her. But he was forced to admit his father's proposition was fair indeed.

He wet his lips with his tongue for the awful plunge he was about to take.

"Alright, dad," he agreed. "Your proposition is fair. But I'll warn you I'll come back to claim her. She

is mine."

"That is understood, my boy," the old man replied. "Now go ahead and make your preparations for the trip. And on your way out send Captain Malcolm to me."

A minute later the captain faced his master. They discussed the affair for some time in subdued voices.

"If I were not so sure that John inherited more of his mother's susceptibility than of my damn fool bulldog tenacity I'd say that he would come back and marry this girl," Jonathan Procter declared. "But he'll see other pretty faces, other pink and white bodies. I expect you to see to it that he does, captain. That is part of your job. The other part is to intercept any letters that the boy may write and also any that she may send him."

Captain Malcolm drew himself up to his full dignified height.

"If you insist upon that, Mr. Procter," he said, you must accept my resignation. I love that boy and I——"

"Yes, and so do I," the other broke in huskily. "Well, never mind about intercepting those letters. I'll find some other way. You go with my boy. I would not let him out of my sight without you."

"Very well, sir." Captain Malcolm bowed.

The next day young John Procter departed with the captain. They were to sail for Paris first, then go to London, Vienna and any other place the boy cared to visit.

Old Jonathan Procter, having shrewdly guessed the motive power back of the entire drama, sought out and found the widowed Mrs. Winters, Rosalyn's adopted mother, who was staying at a select private hotel.

Just as he had expected, she was a mature woman of no charm, but with considerable misapplied ability. She might have made an excellent purchasing agent for

some big firm.

Instead she had chosen to deal in human commodities. She was none the less an efficient haggler.

"You may as well help me," he told her, "because I think you will find there is no particular point in winning the boy if I disinherit him."

"I have reason to suppose that a court of law would recognize that there has been a breach of promise," Mrs. Winters retorted primly. "You don't happen to know how far those young folk have gone, Mr. Procter."

The latter paled a trifle.

"I don't care how far they have gone," he returned quickly. "And I don't care what view a court would take of this matter. It must be hushed up and ended right now. I'll pay you well to help me."

Mrs. Winters became interested.

"How much?" she inquired, her eyes narrowing with greed.

"Fifty-two thousand dollars to be paid in weekly installments of one thousand," said Procter.

The woman gave a gasp. This was far more than she expected.

"What are the conditions?" she asked.

"I will name them, madam." Jonathan Procter's eyes met hers. "The first is that you send me all correspondence between the two young people. The other is that you spend all the money before the year is up. I would like to have you take the girl to the most fashionable watering places. I want her to meet many men and know them well, too.

"If within a year the girl has not met and married a desirable man of wealth, I will agree to pay you a lump sum of fifty thousand dollars more to be spent entirely as you wish with no restrictions attached. Do you ac-

cept this?"

Mrs. Winters did not hesitate. She entered into the bargain with a pleased smile.

"Of course I'll accept, Mr. Procter," she told him, her voice trembling with excitement and pleasure. "But your proposition must be put in writing and signed by us both. It must be an agreement that is binding."

Mr. Procter nodded. And so the bargain between these two was concluded.

Chapter 48

TRUE LOVE.

WHILE THE shrewd Mrs. Winters faithfully carried out her end of the bargain, Captain Malcolm faithfully performed the duties assigned to him. He contrived to have young John Procter meet a good many European beauties. In every city they visited lovely young women of the right kind who seemed to be plentiful.

English girls, unbelievingly fair and much more innocent looking than they really were, would have suffered familiarities from the youthful American millionaire's son which were never taken.

French and Italian women laughingly offered their butterfly passion without winning more than perfunctory attention from John Procter.

The latter concentrated all his interest in life on the arrival of the mail. For two or three weeks after the landing in England this was a source of happiness.

Then it began to be a disappointment. No more letters came.

Still he continued to hope and as the hour arrived for the next steamer to come in, his manner grew more restless, more feverish. Finally he relaxed into a listless state of mind which began to worry Captain Malcolm not a little.

And then one Monday, three months before the period of exile would have been over, old Jonathan Procter cabled them to come home immediately.

Naturally John was excited and also apprehensive. What did it mean? His father had never been

swerved from any purpose. The trip homeward seemed like ages. The Procter private car met them in New York.

That was somewhat of a surprise. Another surprise lay in the fact that old Jonathan Procter had come to New York to welcome his boy. And he seemed so changed. His manner was kind and almost apologetic. As soon as they were under way to Chicago, Captain Malcolm was called into a private conference by his employer.

"Does the damn fool still care for that girl?" the old man asked in all seriousness.

"To the best of my judgment, he does, sir." the captain retorted stiffly.

Jonathan Procter sighed and glanced curiously at the speaker.

"You—you like the boy, don't you?" he inquired.

"John is the finest boy I ever met," came back promptly. "I can't tell you how it hurts me to see him eat his heart out on the trip."

"Because he didn't hear from the girl?"

"Yes."

"And you don't think much of me for stopping those letters, captain?"

"I want your boy to be happy, sir. I love him."

Jonathan Procter swallowed hard.

"Not like I do," the old man said softly. "I love him better than anyone else in this wide world. I admit it was mean of me to intercept those letters. Here is the last one the girl wrote to him." He handed a much worn envelope to Captain Malcolm, who regarded it doubtfully without extracting its contents.

"It's all right to read it," Jonathan Procter remarked quickly. "It is my letter now by right of gift from the writer herself and she has given me permission

to show it to you."

Unable to interpret the statement, the captain drew out the several sheets of paper and commenced to read.

Rosalyn's last message to her young lover was as follows:

"Good-bye, Dear:

"That isn't the usual way to begin a letter, I know, but I had to get it over with right away or I would not have been able to say it. With all that out of the way I can be quite cheerful. Otherwise I would be thinking about it all the time and I'd probably smear the ink all up with tears.

"I am not blaming you in the least bit. I have been raised on the knowledge that men are apt to forget, so I let myself love you with both eyes open. I was even cheating at the time I first met you, cheating and trying to make something out of the fact that God had given me a nice skin and wavy hair and things like that. You probably think that my feelings are hurt because you never answered my letters.

"I have written you before that we have plenty of money. Mrs. Winters has been very nice and kind to me. She insisted upon taking me to every place worth seeing in the United States.

"But several times she got angry because I would not let other men play around me the way they wanted to. And when I told her finally that I was going to have a baby, she nearly had a fit.

"She was furious, called me terrible names and even struck me. Then she told me to get ready and go with her to some place she had

rented up in the mountains where she planned to hide away until it was all over and I could be brought back without any of my men friends knowing anything about it.

"Maybe I am in a peculiarly hysterical condition—I understand that we women sometimes are — but I couldn't help getting the impression that she intended that our baby should never come back with us. The idea tortured me day and night.

"So I did the only thing I could think of. I ran away the day we were to leave for the mountains. I pawned the few things I had for enough money to buy a ticket to New York where I could hide from Mrs. Winters, and here I am. The money is gone and I was pretty hungry before I started to write to you.

"Just talking to you makes me feel alright again, dear. But I must not get too weak for our baby's sake. I am going to be just as sensible as it is possible for a woman to be.

"I'll mail this in care of your father because I don't know your address. And when I have done that, I am going right up to a policeman and ask him to arrest me because I am a bad girl.

"I have heard that they take care of people who are bad, and I don't think the baby will remember it if it is born in jail. Well, that is about all. Of course, I could not close this letter without telling how dearly I still love you.

"If anything should happen that I won't be able to write again, my loving spirit will hover about you always, always. Please remember that, John, darling.

"And if some day you should happen to see in all this world a boy or a girl who looks almost ex-

actly the way you looked that night with me on the beach, take him or her to your heart. You will have to find your child by that description because I won't dare tell your name for fear of doing you an injury.

"Until my dying breath,

your unhappy Rosalyn."

Captain Malcolm folded the sheets slowly and placed them back in the envelope. There was a pained expression on his honest face. His hand trembled slightly as he returned the letter to Jonathan Procter.

"The poor girl," he murmured. "It looks to me as if she has not been given a square deal. Of course, John is most to blame. I had no idea that those young folk had so forgotten themselves. I suppose you consider this the end of the affair, sir."

Mr. Procter shook his head.

"No, for me it is just the beginning," he declared, a peculiar twinkle in his eyes. "That girl has shown the right stuff. She has something in her that money can't buy."

"What do you mean?" inquired the other, puzzled not a little.

"I mean that I have experienced a change of heart so far as this love affair between my boy and Rosalyn is concerned," old Jonathan Procter answered. "That is why I cabled you to bring John back home immediately. I want him to marry her not because it is his duty, but because she is the kind of a girl that will make him happy."

Captain Malcolm stared at the speaker unbeliev-

ingly.

"Mr. Procter," he said, his voice quivering with emotion. "You are doing one of the greatest things in your life. You have no idea what this will mean to your boy."

Jonathan Procter laughed heartily.

"Now let me tell you what I did," he began to explain. "As soon as I got this letter, I took the next train for New York. It wasn't hard to find her. She had just been taken to the hospital. The baby was born, but died shortly afterward. When she was well enough to talk she showed a decided disinclination to see me.

"Not until I told her what was on my mind, did she show the slightest interest. And then she began to cry. I had an awful time making her believe that I really wanted her for my daughter-in-law. But when I succeeded, she fell around my neck and sobbed as though her heart would break.

"She told me that she had never wanted my boy's money, and that she had given herself to him because she loved him. Rosalyn accompanied me back to Chicago and she is recuperating at my home. And now," he ended with a grin, "send John to me, Captain Malcolm. I have a great deal to say to him."

Jonathan Procter lit a cigar as he waited for his son to enter the private compartment of the car. The boy came in presently, his handsome young face weary to the point of sadness.

And then the father unbosomed himself. He frankly admitted his wrong. He told the entire story as he had told it to Captain Malcolm.

"I have been a fool, my boy," he concluded. "I have placed family pride, wealth and social station above the things that are really worth while. I have learned that true happiness can not be purchased with money.

Rosalyn is well worthy to be your wife, and you shall marry her as soon as we get home."

The scene which followed must remain hidden from prying eyes. It is not often that father and son weep in one-another's embrace.

Neither is it necessary to dwell upon what followed. There was a quiet wedding in the Procter home which made two young people gloriously happy. Their married life was one of unalloyed bliss.

And it was Rosalyn's gentle hand which closed old Jonathan Procter's eyes in eternal sleep.

Years had passed since the happy culmination of John Procter's love affair and subsequent marriage. Rosalyn had passed into the great beyond, leaving him alone with two beautiful daughters.

To-day, as John Procter, utterly alone, again lived over the past, he admitted his rank injustice to Betty.

He had cast her off because she married below her station. He had cruelly denied her his parental love and consideration. Ah, if he only knew where he might find her. How gladly would he take her and her automobile mechanic husband to his bosom.

His life, since Betty left, had been an empty shell. It had also been a succession of bitter disappointments.

Only his oldest daughter remained to bring comfort to his old age. But Alice made no attempt to hide the fact that she considered her father somewhat of a nuisance, a necessary evil that had to be endured.

Frequent clashes occurred between them because their ideas on things in general differed so widely.

When the Gordons separated, Alice took malicious delight in slandering Phil's first wife. She insisted that only a woman of low moral character could leave a husband and two children to elope with another man.

But John Procter had known Marie quite well. He

se to her defense. He refused to believe that she had deliberately forsaken her husband and children.

However, the discussion of the Gordon affair was not the only cause for those frequent and violent disagreements. Alice resented her father's efforts to locate Betty. She went to extremes in order to prevent a reconciliation between these two.

While old John Procter had no positive proof that Alice was in some way obstructing his repeated attempts to find Betty, instinct told him that it was being done.

For instance, he recalled now that on several occasions he had not been able to find the morning paper. When he made inquiries of Alice, she told him that the carrier had failed to bring it.

Another thing, he had not been quite able to understand, why Alice, after Betty had gone, took it upon herself to bring his mail to him daily.

She had never been sufficiently interested in his private affairs before to go to that trouble.

Another bitter quarrel had resulted when Alice suddenly decided to take a trip to Europe. John Procter had more than a mere suspicion that his daughter was running after Philip Gordon.

When she returned as Gordon's second wife, he was deeply shocked.

Instead of congratulating Phil, he felt sorry for him. Rather a strange thing for a father to do. But he knew that Alice had not married Gordon because she loved him.

Indeed, he honestly believed that his oldest daughter was utterly incapable of loving anyone beside herself. He had various good reasons for this belief, for he knew his oldest daughter for what she was.

There was not the least doubt in his mind but that Alice had married Philip Gordon to gratify an ambition.

Once another woman had taken him away from her, and she was determined that this should not happen again.

The relations between Alice and her father had become more strained since her wedding.

She gave herself to a life of pleasure and self-gratification. She had neither the time nor the inclination to visit her old home. As a matter of fact, "the old man," as she called him, had ceased to exist so far as she was concerned.

Her only interest now was centered upon the amount she would inherit in case of his death. To be rich in her own right had become an obsession. Being just "Mrs. Philip Gordon" had lost most of its glamor.

And then came prospective motherhood which Alice resented bitterly. She almost hated the man responsible for it.

To be burdened with children of her own was a terrible thing. She lived in constant fear that the ordeal of becoming a mother would permanently mar her good looks.

To this was added the dread that she might not survive. She became extremely irritable and quarrelsome. Frequent fits of violent temper when crossed, aggravated her condition.

It brought on the premature birth of a baby girl. Alice had one foot in the grave, and the other was slipping fast.

It was then that she asked that her father be sent for. Philip had John Procter on the phone the next minute and after telling him that he was a grandfather, urged him to come at once to Oak Manor.

And John Procter said something which again reminded Phil what little affection the old gentleman had for his own child.

"I suppose I ought to offer you my congratula

tion," he drawled. "But I won't, Phil. I feel more like offering you my deep sympathy. In my estimation Alice is not fit to be a mother."

Gordon could not find a fitting reply to this speech. All he said was:

"Please come at once, dad. The chances are that your daughter may pass away within the next twenty-four hours."

"Alright," came back none too pleasant. "If that is the case, I'll come at once."

Gordon hung up the receiver with a pained expression in his eyes. He could not help feeling sorry for old John Procter. And he felt sorry for Alice.

His mind was made up to do all in his power to smooth out the differences between father and daughter.

Chapter 49

A PAINFUL DISCUSSION.

BY THE TIME Mr. Procter arrived at Oak Manor, a turn for the better had come in Alice's condition. Philip Gordon drew his father-in-law into the library and closed the door. For quite a while these two men stood face to face in uncomfortable silence. It seemed that each was waiting for the other to speak first.

"Well, how is she?" John Procter inquired gruffly.

"I think all danger is past, dad," the young man answered with a deep sigh. "I can't tell you how glad I am."

"Glad?" snorted the old man. "Do you mean that?"

Philip gazed at the speaker, surprised.

"Why — er, yes," he stammered. "Of course, I mean it."

"Are you happy with her?" The question came point blank. "I want you to tell me the truth, Phil."

The latter, obviously confused, tried to smile and made a failure of it.

"We have not been getting along as peacefully as we might have," he admitted, his voice holding a note of pain. "But God knows I tried my best to—to——"

"To make the best of a bad bargain," the old man supplied quickly. "That is what you should say, my boy. Phil Gordon, you were a fool to marry that oldest daughter of mine. Alice is not the kind of a woman to make any man happy. She is too selfish. The union between you two was founded on the wrong principles."

"Perhaps it was," Phil admitted ruefully. "It was done too hastily. But I have given my wife everything a woman could wish for."

"You have given her too much," John Procter declared, laying emphasis on the last word. "Now I am not blaming you in the least, my boy, and I am proud to call you son. But I feel very sorry for you because you gave so much and received so little in return."

Philip Gordon turned away.

"In the first place," the old man went on, "I disapproved of Alice running after you all the way to Europe. I knew what her purpose was. Well, everything I predicted then has come to pass. She made you about as miserable as a man can be.

"Don't try to deny it. I have been hearing a good many things these last few months. Ah, what a good thing it would be if she died right now——"

"Please — please, dad," Philip begged. "Do not talk like that. Alice has her good points and we were very happy for a time."

"It is just like you to defend her, my boy," Procter replied. "You must forgive me for speaking so plainly about my own flesh and blood. But I don't believe in sidestepping the truth even if it be a painful truth. Ah, you don't know all the heartaches that girl has caused me."

"But why speak of unpleasant things, dad," Phil objected mildly. "Let us forget them."

The old man waved his hand and settled back in his chair.

"You know," he said confidingly, "it does a fellow good to unburden himself. You will understand because you have been made to suffer." He drew out his handkerchief and blew his nose. "I really have no right to blame Alice for all of my unhappiness, for I have been a cruel, selfish monster myself."

"Why, in what way, dad?" Phil wanted to know.

"I allowed foolish pride to dominate me and I wantonly destroyed the life of one whom I loved better than any other human being on earth." John Procter paused and wiped a tear from his eyes. "I am speaking of my youngest daughter, Betty. I suppose you heard that she married against my will, haven't you?"

"Why, I believe I did hear something about that," the younger man said.

"Well," the old man continued, "I denied her the rights and privileges I demanded and received in my youth. She loved the boy, a really fine chap with a clean record and ambitious.

"Because he was only a poor automobile mechanic. I showed her the door and I told her that I never wanted to look upon her face again. God only knows how I regretted that night.

"I have done everything to find Betty. I would gladly take her back into the family fold and give that young husband of hers a chance, but they have disappeared without leaving a trace. You—you can't realize what my Betty meant to me," he went on sobbingly. "She was the light of my life.

"She had inherited the sweet, tender disposition of her sainted mother. Whenever I had a quarrel with Alice and felt sad and depressed, it was always Betty who cheered me.

"Every morning she brought sunshine into the house. Every night she sat at my feet and comforted me. She clung to me with a childish devotion not often found among growing children in this jazz-mad age.

"And how did I reward her? I disowned her because she fell in love with a poor young man. In doing that I inflicted an unending punishment upon myself. The morning sun only rekindles my remorse. My nights

are sleepless and filled with ghastly dreams. Betty, oh, my Betty, what would I not give to——"

Here the poor old man broke down utterly and wept aloud.

Philip Gordon rose and went over to his father-in-law.

"Try not to feel too badly about it, dad," he said gently and placed an arm about his shoulders. "We all make mistakes. I am sure Betty is not lost to you forever. She'll turn up some of these days and then you can made amends."

John Procter raised his head and patted the hand resting on his arm.

"My—my boy," he blubbered. "those are the first words of real comfort I have heard since Betty left. Ah, you don't know what a lonely life I have been leading since that cursed night. I used to find a little pleasure in going to the club. But even that is over. And when I gete back home I start brooding about my baby girl—that's what I used to call her—my baby girl."

Gordon felt deeply sorry for the old chap and he told him so.

"I'll make a suggestion, dad," he ended. "Why don't you come here and live with us? There is plenty of room in this big house. I am glad to have you. This is really a splendid place during the summer months."

John Procter's eyes cleared and shone with gratitude as he looked at Phil.

"My boy," he exclaimed, reaching for Phil's hand and shaking it heartily, "I shall be more than glad to come."

"Then that is settled," smiled Phil. "You stay right here and I'll send for your personal effects. Now cheer up. We must not forget the old saying that every cloud has a silver lining."

"You are right. You are right." The old man rose and took a few turns up and down the room. "By jove, I am feeling better already. By the way, how are your two children?"

"Doing nicely," was the prompt response. "But don't you think you had better go up and see Alice first?"

"No hurry about that," the other returned with a deprecating wave of his hand. "I am really not in a mood to talk to Alice right now. I might be tempted to give her a piece of my mind. I want to see your two youngsters now."

Arm in arm the two men walked up the stairs to the nursery.

A surprise awaited them there—a surprise which warmed Philip Gordon's heart and made him pause on the threshold, as if unwilling to intrude upon the touching scene that met his shining eyes.

Beside little Harry's bed sat the governess, Phyllis on her knees, her right arm supporting the boy whose head rested against her shoulders, and both children were listening with rapt attention to the story that was being related to them.

When Marie observed the two men in the door, she broke off suddenly and allowed Harry to slip gently back on the pillow.

Little Phyllis was already on her feet, running to greet her daddy and the old gentleman with him. Although she did not know that the latter was her grandfather, she ran right into his open arms.

"Well, well, what a sweet girl you are," the old man cried, a happy note in his voice.

"Kiss your granddaddy, honey," said Phil with a smile. "He has come on a visit and he will stay with us. Of course, you'll be nice to him, won't you?"

"I will," promised the child. "And I'll love him

too."

Tears came into the old man's eyes. With Phyllis in his arms, he approached and he was introduced to the boy and the governess.

Marie dreaded to face John Procter, whose favorite she had been in the years gone by. She spoke in a low voice as she acknowledged the introduction.

Again fear of being recognized by the old gentleman gnawed at her heart. But the danger passed. John Procter turned to the boy on the bed and began to talk to him.

Marie found herself face to face with Phil. Her heart throbbed as she forced back the tears.

He looked so pale and careworn. His handsome features were deeply lined. And no wonder. The last two days and nights had been frightful. Her thoughts quickly wandered back to the time when he had trembled for her life.

What a proud, happy father he had been when she presented him with their firstborn. And how gloriously happy he had been when Phyllis came later.

But to-day there was not the slightest trace of joy in his face, only a tired, weary expression that spoke volumes.

"No doubt you have heard that we had a very trying night, Miss Desmond." he said slowly. "I am worried about—about the baby."

"Will it live?" asked Marie, vaguely, in a subdued voice.

Philip Gordon shook his head.

"God alone knows," he answered. "The doctor holds out little hope."

"And—and Mrs. Gordon?"

"She is out of danger, Miss Desmond. But she requires the most careful attention."

He said this almost curtly and turned away, joining his father-in-law at Harry's bedside. As he bent over to kiss the boy, Marie caught a glimpse of his face and saw that his eyes were wet.

Presently the two men turned to leave the nursery. John Procter said a few words to the governess as he relinguished little Phyllis to her.

Marie's cheeks crimsoned for a moment. She dreaded the old gentleman's searching gaze and she imagined she saw him start at the sound of her voice.

"I was very favorably impressed with this Miss Desmond," Procter said to his son-in-law as they reached the library. "You are indeed fortunate to have a woman like her taking care of your children. Both of them appear to be devoted to her. But," he paused and scratched his head, "she reminds me of someone. Her voice, her gestures and her carriage—hm——"

Occupied with his own thoughts, Phil heard only half. His heart was full of bitterness.

"Yes, you are right, dad," he replied, still somewhat in thought. "Miss Desmond is a remarkable young woman. Both of the children love her, and she loves them. I don't know how we could get along without her. I hate to think of ever losing her."

"No reason why you should," the older man remarked quietly.

"But she wouldn't be here now if I had allowed Alice to have her way," said Phil. "She conceived a violent dislike for Miss Desmond and demanded that I discharge her."

"Discharge her? Why, my boy?"

Then Gordon told of the violent quarrel between himself and his wife, the reason for it and the result. John Procter listened, half in surprise, half in anger.

"What damned nonsense!" he exclaimed as Phil

finished. "Well, I am glad you didn't let Alice get away with it. You must rule her with a firm hand. Assert your authority. You are the master of this house, aren't you? You just wait until that daughter of mine is well enough to stand a scolding. I shall have something to say to her."

Phil Gordon laid a hand on his father-in-law's arm.

"I—I wish you wouldn't be too severe with her," he pleaded. "Alice is so high strung that——"

"Oh, I know her, believe me," the other interrupted. "She gets hysterical when crossed. She always did that. But it never frightened me." He paused for a moment, then asked: "Did you ever quarrel with Alice in the presence of others?"

"Not that I remember," said Phil, his brow somewhat clouded. "Yet, that may have happened. Why do you ask me that, dad?"

"Because most of your friends seemed to know that you two don't get along," the latter replied. "Of course, it might have been mere gossip. Several times I came upon a group of folk in the act of discussing your domestic affairs. They hushed quickly enough when they saw me. Once I heard a woman say that Alice hated your two children and that she was responsible for little Harry's illness."

Gordon smothered a groan and averted his face. His father-in-law was watching him closely.

"I hope that isn't true, Phil, is it?" the latter inquired.

"But it is true, dad," the other asserted, meeting John Procter's stare of blank astonishment. "She insisted that my boy must sleep with the windows wide open during cold nights. And all she gave him for covering was a thin blanket. He caught a heavy cold, which

developed into pneumonia. He hasn't been well since."

The old gentleman gave vent to his amazement by muttering something not taught in the Sunday schools.

"And you stood for that?" he demanded.

"I didn't know it," was the remorseful retort." "When I found out how cruel she had been to my children the harm was done. But thank God, they are receiving the best of care now. I have implicit confidence in Miss Desmond."

For quite a while silence reigned. John Procter was pacing the floor with his hand linked behind his back. Suddenly he wheeled upon his son-in-law.

"I must see her!" he burst out at last, his anger rising.

"No," Phil dissented. "Wait until she is strong enough to——"

"I am going to see Alice right now." Procter insisted. "Don't stop me and I don't want you to go with me either. Now don't worry, my boy. I promise you I won't lose my temper."

He stalked from the room, slamming the door with unnecessary violence.

Gordon strode over to the window and looked out. While he regretted the circumstances which prompted him to speak the truth about his second wife, he could not find it in his heart to feel sorry for her.

No one knew better than he did how well Alice deserved the lecture she would receive from her father.

Ah, what a frightful mistake he had made when he made her his second wife. The scales had dropped from his eyes and he saw the miserable, wretched life with her before him in all its startling nakedness.

But the face of another woman presented itself to his mind's eyes. It rose before him like a mirage in the desert beckoning to a thirst-tortured traveler, fill-

his heart with a vain longing for the dead happiness that had once been his. The face was that of Marie Desmond, the governess.

What a really wonderful young woman she was. Never in all his life had he met one who was more unselfish and self-sacrificing. And what a wife she would make——"

Phil's train of thought stopped here very abruptly.

Chapter 50

VISIONS.

JOHN PROCTER did not get an opportunity to appease his wrath, for on his way to the sick room he was met by Dr. Van Buren. After a few terse questions the physician made it emphatic that Mrs. Gordon must not be disturbed because of her high nervous state. Very much disappointed the old gentleman turned away and sought to cool his anger by a walk through the spacious grounds. He did not meet Phil again until that evening at dinner.

Both seemed to have experienced a change of heart so far as Alice was concerned. Neither alluded to her during the conversation at the table and afterward while smoking on the veranda.

They discussed in detail all arrangements consequent to the old gentleman's acceptance of Phil's invitation to make his home at Oak Manor. When the nurse came to inform Gordon that his wife had fallen into a sound sleep, both men breathed a sigh of relief.

"I am going back to Chicago to take care of a few little business matters," John Procter announced before he retired. "It will probably take a few days, and then I am coming back to stay."

"Come back as quickly as you can, dad," Phil begged. "I need you."

Yes, I think you do," his father-in-law grinned meaningly.

Their hands met in a long clasp of understanding and sympathy.

Continued in next number

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